

Big Rapids Community Library
Focus Group - noon
June 26, 2008

25 individuals attended the noon focus group session held at the Big Rapids City Hall. When asked, most reported they visited the library at least monthly; however 2 individuals indicated they had not been to the library in the past year.

Marianne posed a series of questions to the group:

What do you believe the Big Rapids community expects from the library? Why do you use the library?

- We mainly use Ferris' Library or go online
- Use it for microform / fiche – but am interested in the library
- I have no computer – go to the library often, it is a form of entertainment, free entertainment, I have many questions as to why we can't enlarge it
- The Library has a tremendous amount of potential, we have not done anything to the library, it is underutilized, lots lacking, when you put it in perspective with other things done in the community we have got by without doing anything for the Library
- My needs have changed, use it now for much more for enjoyment, we discovered free internet when traveling, been in lots of library, amazing to see what has happened to libraries, becoming comfortable settings, coffee shops, fireplaces, well used places, people go there to browse, community gathering places, library is a highlight for children, kids are there all the time, but at our library there is no room for them, it is so noisy, Ferris is fabulous & accessible, but if you're not a pedestrian you don't go there, the general public does not go there
- I get books to read for pleasure, but as a human services person – many people we are seeing are struggling, but I think of programs that could be done at the library, families need somewhere to go, partnerships could be formed
- Library is a gateway to the rest of the world, for books, but also for many of the other activities, it is a window to a larger world

What do you like about the library

- Location
- The library is important for senior citizens & kids

- The ability to walk to the Library
- Being a community center is important
- Place for children in the summertime
- Programs have been fabulous
- Like the staff
- Don't like that a lot of it is not usable
- Basement is scary, catacombed
- Bathroom is downstairs, there is an elevator, but not really accessible
- It was a school, could it be expanded? What can we do to keep it where it is, it is a landmark
- Adding on to the library is a possibility, (there is) plenty of room for parking – quite a bit of land, biggest problem is money
- I like the programs for children
- Space is a huge problem in the library – the copy machine and new books shelves are in the doorway
- There is nowhere to really sit
- I have no problem with the location if you can add space
- The logistics in the building is bad
- There is something intangible & comforting in an old building, if basement and building can be made to code, important to be a good steward & I am interested in recycling, but if cost is more – then no
- Finances are a big issue, I agree with most of the comments from the people who live in the townships, but are the townships willing to pay for it, because right now it is on my pocketbook because I live in town

What do you believe is the most equitable way for all library users to finance library costs and services?

- I can't think of better way for my money to be spent in the Township
- I am a Township person – we should help pay for it
- I have some question of District vs. City library – if you put cash out you want to have some buy in, who does it belong to?
- City of Big Rapids has a lot of problems and I don't see any way that a new tax increase would pass, we have a water/sewage issue, we are still paying for the safety building, we have to be realistic and if you could see what the city problems are you will know why we want to stay in the same building and do improvements as money becomes available

What do you feel is a fair amount for each household to pay for the library on an annual basis?

- Almost everyone present (25) agreed they would pay \$10 per month for library services
- One-third 8 individuals indicated they would pay \$15 month
- A few (3-4) were willing to pay \$ 20 per month

Many communities in Michigan have been successful in forming district libraries, composed of several governmental units cooperating to provide services and share costs over a larger geographic area. Do you believe this type of structure could be successful in Big Rapids? Why/Why not?

- Has there ever been a study saying that the voters would have to pay xxx amount?
- It bothers me when people talk about fireplaces, are we talking about a Taj Mahal or a library?
- Is anyone looking into converting into a district library, we (indicating those present) can spearhead if we want to – we funded the river walk that way
- Who gets the consultants' report? (Luann responded: it will go to the Library Committee)
- I hope people appreciate the complexity of this issue, we need to think to the future, we always get what we pay for, if it is important to the people it will happen, we need to consider what would happen if the library was more conducive to programs, to kids, had a fireplace, etc.

Any other comments you'd like to share with the Library Committee or Library Board?

- I believe it would not be too far-fetched to get others to pay for an improved library
- It already is a community library, but not funded as one
- I like the library where it is – the location, the building needs to be rehabbed, Mecosta has a nice new library, Howard City has a new library, Traverse City has huge library,
- We don't have to have everything today, I would like to see a plan for the library in the future, a vision down the road, think about what we need later

- The school system will have only library aides in the future – some real concern about no librarians in schools anymore
- Public funding, 20 years or so, we needed a new track, we approached the banks and we raised the rest of the money, is there any way to do something like that?
- Rochester (MI) as an example, built the library but did not include funding to stock it
- Accolades for the Friends of the Library – they are a great addition

Big Rapids Community Library
Focus Group – 4:00 pm
June 26, 2008

22 individuals attended the 4 o'clock pm focus group session held at the Big Rapids City Hall. When asked, approximately half the group reported they visited the library at least monthly; everyone in attendance had visited the library within the past 3 months.

Marianne posed a series of questions to the group:

What do you believe the Big Rapids community expects from the library? What do you expect from the Library?

- To have books
- To have up-to-date books
- Big Rapids is more knowledgeable and has a better collection about some things than Ferris
- Assistance in getting resources we don't have
- Internet access
- Programs
- Be nice to have a garden room, a cozy area to read, more computers
- I would like it open more hours
- The phone number is kept secret
- I like the outreach programs
- To keep up with what is happening
- To offer more internet
- To keep the webpage more current
- Space is a big problem, it is a claustrophobic building
- If I read a book review, I want the library to have it

What do you like most / like least about the library?

Most:

- Like the neighborhood setting
- Like it where it is in neighborhood – I live there, I like the green area outside
- Like prompt service, the video collection
- Location is good, not on a busy street, can walk to it
- I like the staff the best
- Excellent location, would like to see the library remain there, would like to see a walking area to Ferris and have the library anchor it

- Like that it exists; but would like to have it in a downtown location
- Wonderful staff
- Like the location
- Like the staff – they are wonderful
- Like the staff
- Like the video collection
- Like the outreach program for children
- Like the big windows, some comfortable chairs on 2nd floor
- I like the Cadillac Library and would like to have it here
- I like the location, I don't find the space too detrimental to adults
- I was born and raised here, I went to school there, I like the location, I don't want you to move Anna Ward Shaw

Least:

- Lack of space
- Don't like the feeling of claustrophobia
- Need handicapped parking area for me
- It is crowded; not open enough
- Don't like the space, I am not tied to that space, the property is cramped, space is cramped
- Irregular funding
- Parking and funding
- Physically uncomfortable place to be in, it is chaotic
- It is cramped
- It does get cramped
- Needs better funding
- Just a lending library, not a comfortable space
- Walls are sterile, not a place to stay and read
- Don't understand the need for the library to stay on the plot of land there, but it does need to stay in town
- Don't like the space, it is cramped and claustrophobic
- Non-functioning computers for children, too small space for children
- Miss the two exits, would like a location that you can spread out
- Would have to move Anna Shaw
- Cramped
- I worry about people using the restrooms in the basement
- Find the space detrimental to children
- There is no reading room, I don't feel comfortable upstairs

What do you believe is the most equitable way for all library users to finance library costs and services?

- Has to become a user fee system somehow (note: this was clarified later in the discussion. The speaker meant a tax or assessment that is equal among all users)
- I don't agree with a user fee – those that most need the services can't pay for it
- Tax idea is a good idea
- But also fund raising like a glossy gala, fund raisers should be creative
- Taxation needs to be throughout the Library District
- It doesn't make a difference if I go in the library a lot or not; a good library is a draw to the community
- If Townships don't want to pay, then block those residents from using the library
- What is the funding situation? (note: Marianne explained penal fines, state aid and local support for libraries in Michigan)
- How would a library district be funded (note: Marianne explained district library funding)

What do you feel is a fair amount for each household to pay for the library on an annual basis?

Pay \$10 per month – everyone – yes

Pay \$15 per month – 1/2 yes

Pay \$20 per month – 1/3 yes

- Big Rapids has a city income tax but all revenue comes from the general fund and it amounts to about 1 mill
- I don't know what my township pays, but I am willing for us to make sure that we meet our obligation
- I am flabbergasted that there is no accountability for collecting money from townships
- What about overdue fines? (response from Gaylynn: we collect about \$5,000 per year)
- What about fund raisers? Friends do a number of activities.
- In visiting libraries sometimes there is a sales tax – is this a possibility?
- Has anyone done a calculation of what the cost would be if Big Rapids Township residents paid an equal share?

Any other comments you'd like to share with the Library Committee or Library Board?

- I would like to see an income tax include township area – much of the business is now in the township
- There is not adequate street parking, need to have a parking lot, in winter it is terrible
- A minor suggestion – display new books when they arrive and offer the opportunity to have an announcement of recent arrivals emailed
- Library space is not being used well

Big Rapids Community Library
Focus Group
June 26, 2008 – 7:00 pm

20 individuals attended the 7 o'clock pm focus group session held at the Big Rapids City Hall. When asked, most reported they visited the library at least monthly; 3 individuals indicated they had visited once in the past 3 months; 2 individuals had not been to the library in 20 years and stated they did not plan to visit.

Marianne posed a series of questions to the group:

What do you believe the Big Rapids community expects from the library? Why do you use the Library?

- Recreational reading
- All kinds of reading
- To serve all age groups
- Library has saved me money over the years
- Programs
- Helps to build community spirit
- Books on tape
- Do it yourself books, gardening
- Meeting place
- Videos for my kids, educational, research, but sometimes the library does not have what I'm looking for
- I want newer things
- Work with literacy program
- A place to read
- A study area, larger tables, work areas\
- Melcat is a real godsend
- People who work there are marvelous

What to you like most / like least about the library?

Most:

- They know me by name
- I feel good about walking in the library
- I am greeted by name
- I like storyhour, love the children's computers
- Feeling of belonging

- I feel welcomed
- There are always new books coming in
- This library has a long history of responding to needs; almost feels like family, a sense of community

Least:

- I am nervous on 2nd floor with 60 people there
- I worry about the bathrooms
- It is crowded
- The aesthetics put me off
- The floor wobbles & squeaks
- It smells bad
- It does not have the space
- I love the building, but it is not aesthetically welcoming
- Parking is always a problem

What do you believe is the most equitable way for all library users to finance library costs and services?

- A District library tax, everybody pays the same thing (note: Marianne explained district library formation/funding for those who were not familiar with it)
- Fundraising is a possibility
- Can you petition local businesses for support?
- Can the grants person for Big Rapids help?

What do you feel is a fair amount for each household to pay for the library on an annual basis?

\$10 - most raised their hand

\$15 - 7 yes

\$ 20 - 5 yes

Nothing – 1 individual

Any other comments you'd like to share with the Library Committee or Library Board?

- I'd like a structurally sound library – I don't feel safe in it now
- Parking is an issue at times, particularly when there are children's programs

- If we kept our current location, there is church parking next to it – can you work out an agreement with sharing that?
- I'd like a larger selection of media than is there now
- A green building
- Safe, clean, energy efficient environment
- Ample work areas
- Place where children can be children
- Take what we have and do more of it
- More do it yourself books, fiction, more space
- Would it be feasible to build, pay for it and then build on?
- Some sort of a meeting room, children's story hour space, a multi-purpose room
- Computers need to be available, not every family has computer or access to one
- I like a park-like setting
- I don't mind the statue
- Is there a way they can offer classes? – a need here in the city for GED, employment coaching – Michigan Works
- We could have a coffee shop
- Space for Art shows, displays – have wall space with a theme
- I want a well-lit building with chairs, a fireplace
- Keep the trees
- Need more newer materials, latest information for projects for schools
- Library needs to be energy efficient
- Library needs to be on a single floor so you can see from one end to another for security
- I want it to have charm
- Current building should be a landmark
- Townspeople don't feel welcome at FSU FLITE Library
- Having FLITE means we don't need to duplicate services like research
- Newer libraries are changing, libraries need to change to be a place where people want to go, be able to use laptops, a meeting place, a welcoming place